

The Composer

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Summary: Shortly after the Human-Covenant war, the ONI went for a hunt for the remaining Halo rings. On 2553, they discovered the Installation 03 and they even made a secret base for it, called 'Ivanoff Research Station' led by Dr. Sandra Tillson. What she and her team find in that ring world will be the deadliest discovery in this universe! Its secret is far more fatal than Halo.

## 1. Chapter One - The Arrival

**\*\*The Composer\*\***

**\_\*\*Chapter one: The Arrival\*\*\_**

**\*\*March 2552, Ivanoff Research Station; Khaphrae system\*\***

UNSC Infinity slowly inched toward a massive asteroid belt. The hangar bay of the ship opened up and three pelicans exited, shooting straight into the asteroid belt. Because within these rocks one of ONI's secret bases called Ivanoff is located. It was placed here shortly after the discovery of Installation 03. It was a home base for chief scientists and archaeologists to dig into the secrets of installation 03. However, it was also completely equipped for battle with HAVOK nukes, Mantis Mech, MAC, Broadwords and Pelicans. It had round the clock protection from the UNSC marines, because ONI did not want any mishaps here.

"Just look at that," Simon wondered as he peeked through the pelican's window. "Halo; so glorious." The other three ODSTs took a peek after seeing Simon's awe struck face.

"She's a beauty," George accepted without even looking out. He was too busy polishing his M395 Designated Marksman Rifle. Simon bummed him over his shoulder, "You are not looking," he complained. George glared at him for a second and returned his attention back to his rifle.

Clara was not impressed with the view. She felt something very ominous about the ring. Handy caught Clara's troubled look and asked, "Not fancy enough?"

Clara shot a look back at Handy, wondering what he was asking about. Then she realized Handy was staring at her. Damn it, Clara cursed. This is what she hated about Handy, he was too observant. "I see only death in it," Clara said and turned away. "It is ominous!"

"Fair enough," Handy said with a smile and turned his attention toward the ring because he was thinking the same thing.

Taylor was watching his new squad closely trying to figure out whether they were as good as his previous team mates, who were like his family. However, he lost them, every single one of them. He led them to death. At that moment he wished he was dead with them.

"Hey Sarge," Simon called out, interrupting Taylor's thought. "What do you think about Halo?"

Taylor looked up and took a glance at the Halo that was looming out in the dark space, dwarfing every single thing around it, even the UNSC's biggest warship, Infinity, looked like a speck of dust next to it. This was not his first rodeo to Halo. He was one of the few marines who landed in Delta Halo with Sergeant Major Avery J. Johnson through 'In Amber Clad', went through hell and returned back to earth. So he knew what exactly he was looking into. In spite of all the dread within, it did look mighty to him. When Simon saw that Taylor was not going or not willing to answer back he just shrugged his shoulder and turned back to sightseeing.

The pelican corrected its course due to the incoming asteroids in its path, and soon the Halo was shadowed behind huge asteroid rocks. The pelican dipped and rolled in order to avoid the incoming rocks. Yet little debris escaped the pilot's skillful maneuver and bumped the pelican's nose and bounced off giving a thumping noise within.

"Approaching the station in five," the pilot of Pelican-099 announced.

Taylor, the squad leader of ODST Alpha, got up and said, "Get ready ladies. We are approaching the station. Our mission is simple, round up with the other squads and we are gonna march into that Halo. We are here for a search and rescue mission, not for the guard duty. So look alive. The moment our mission gets over, we are flying back home. Are you with me?" he finished.

"Sir, yes Sir," the four man squad replied back in unison as they got their gears together.

The station was placed right in middle of the Asteroid belt, which was revolving around the Halo and it's threshold planet. Ivanoff was sitting on top of the biggest rock among the pile, completely camouflaged from a weary eye. The pelican made its final course corrections as it came closer to the station. The other two pelicans were following its trail, so the pilot had to be precise in his course or it could be a disaster.

"This is Pelican-099 approaching the station, with Pelican-075 and

Pelican-089. Permission to enter the station," the pilot radioed in.

"Green light Pelican-099, you are free to land on Bay 6, 075 you can land on Bay 7 and 089 on Bay 8," the radio echoed.

"Copy that," the Pelican-099 pilot said and angled his bird for the final landing. The hangar bay was eight hundred meters away and the bay doors silently opened up. Once the pelican reached five hundred meters the pilot let go of the thruster and gently swooped into the bay. All three pelicans landed together and the bay doors slowly sealed back.

"Successful touch down, you are clear to exit," the pilot announced to his passenger.

Taylor punched the pelican door controls and the door slowly hissed open and formed a ramp as the ODST squad marched out.

"This place is bigger than I thought," Simon said as he exited the pelican first followed by George, Clara, Handy and finally Taylor.

"Corporeal, you have a big mouth," George commented for which Clara chuckled and Handy nodded in agreement. The Alpha squad exited the pelican and formed a line in front of their Sergeant who waited for the Bravo and Charlie team to assemble. Once all the three teams assembled on the Hanger bay they marched to the station's HQ lead by Taylor.

"Welcome to your new home," Captain Hickory Jonah said as all the three 'special' ODST squads assembled. "Thanks for the accepting my special invite," Captain teased. "You are here for a special mission. Some of my high profile Doctors went missing on a special site in the Installation 03. I have sent all my marines down there under my command, but they were spread too thin. So I needed you, the ODSTs, best of the best. And Captain Thomas Lasky was grateful enough to lend you to me, temporarily," he said with a crooked smile, which made Taylor uneasy. Something about Captain Jonah was off.

"So I want you all to take some rest, and first thing in the morning you will be taken to the site," he finished. "You are now dismissed." The marines gave a salute, turned and exited the HQ.

"Sergeant Taylor one moment," Captain Jonah said. The Alpha squad hesitated for a second, then they kept marching out. Taylor turned back, "Sir?"

Captain Jonah slowly walked around Taylor as if he was inspecting him, with the same crooked smile that made Taylor uneasy and said, "Impressive record you have Sergeant; Discovery in Installation 04, African Portal mission, all good stuff, except the last mission."

The mention of his last mission stung Taylor like a bee sting. He straightened a bit and looked into the Captain's eyes. It somehow matched with Clara's Halo description 'Ominous'.

"Sir," Taylor began, but was interrupted by Jonah. "I think it will be only wise if you just lead the Alpha squad you rode in with. I

will assign one of my boys for the Bravo and Charlie squads. One baby step at a time," he mocked. "Is it clear, son?" Jonah asked.

"Yes sir," Taylor said in a calm voice. "Anything else, sir?"

"Please go and meet Dr. Sandra Tillson. You will be led to her by the station's AI. Tillson will brief you on the missing persons profile and the site they were digging. You may go now," Jonah said and turned his back to Taylor. Taylor saluted and exited feeling hurt. It was his mistake for what happened. His squad obeyed and followed his fatal orders. He wished once more that he was dead with his team mates.

'If only' he wondered and walked towards Dr. Sandra Tillson's lab.

## 2. Chapter Two: Fear of the Unknown

**\*\*Chapter Two: Fear of the unknown\*\***

**\*\*March 2552, Dr. Sandra Tillson's Lab; Ivanoff Research Station.\*\***

Dr. Sandra Tillson was fiddling with her monitors as she was desperately trying to figure out where exactly her scientists disappeared. She played the last transmission over and over again.

\_"Day fourteen, we are at the heart of the Cathedral. Apart from the sentinels we have not met with any other resistance. The clues have led us this far and we are optimistic. If we find what we think we are looking for, this is going to change everything," \_the recording continued\_. "We are going to travel into the depths of this colossal forerunner structure called as, if the translations are right, 'Death Upon.' Sounds scary, but I'm excited. This is Rachel Reed signing off."\_

These were the last transmissions from one of her esteemed students, Dr. Rachel who was currently leading the ground team in the Installation 03. Every rescue op failed trying to follow the lost team into the 'Death Upon.' But still Tillson was hopeful; she knows she is missing something, once she figures it out, the bread crumbs will be revealed.

The station's AI, Abey, who took a form of a Cherokee Indian girl, popped up at a nearby console at Sandra's lab.

"You have a visitor Doctor," she announced.

"Go away Abey, I'm busy," Sandra snapped at her AI.

"Trust me Doctor you want to see this person. He is here to retrieve you team," Abey said with a smile in her face.

"Spartan?" Sandra looked up hopefully. She specifically requested Captain Jonah for a team of Spartans to retrieve her team.

"No, the second best option. An ODST," Abey said hopefully.

Sandra looked away with a disappointed look. "Enough cat and mouse game has been played by those marines for the past one week and still no whereabouts of my team," Sandra growled as her frustrations started to grow.

"I will do my best to retrieve your team," a voice interfered from behind her. Sandra swung around and saw a tall and handsome man standing stiffly. By the uniform he wore she knew he was a sergeant, with a name tag reading 'Taylor' and by the look of those tired eyes, she knew he was battle worn too. Unaware that Abey has led the soldier into her lab without her knowledge Sandra shot a glance at her AI, who looked apologetic, and stepped forward.

"I know you will do your best Sergeant," Sandra replied with a calm voice yet with a fierce tone. "That is what all the other rescue team told me before they left."

"We are no Spartans, I agree, Mam," Sergeant Taylor said, "But we will get this job done."

Sandra wanted to believe this man, because something about him gave her confidence and hope.

"So how can I help you Sergeant?" Sandra said finally coming to terms that this new squad is the only, even might be the last hope for her team.

"Captain asked me to see you in order to get debriefed Mam," Taylor said.

"And why is that? Doesn't the good Captain have the details regarding my team? After all he is the one who was organizing the rescue," Sandra wondered and was visibly irritated.

Taylor was wondering the same thing, but he didn't respond. He just stood there.

Finally Sandra Tillson gave up and said, "Abey bring up the roster."

"Yes Doctor," Abey replied and made a wave with her left hand and the monitors in the lab filled with pictures and details.

"This is Rachel," Sandra said pointing at the picture of a young woman with dark glasses. The report read:

Name: Rachel Reed

Age: 26 years

Designation: Archaeologist and Ancient Linguistic expert.

Taylor was visibly impressed seeing such a profile at a young age. More over her calm face made Taylor feel different, which he hasn't felt since he has lost his fiancÃ©.

"She is my finest and the best," Sandra interrupted and Taylor straightened knowing that he got drifted away in thoughts. "She was the lead in this expedition. Along with her there are two other

scientists, Dr. Rishi and Dr. Wong. I will uploaded all the necessary details into your datapad. They are my priceless assets Sergeant Taylor. I want them, and most importantly the structure they are looking for is far more important. As you can see," Sandra generally waved her hands at her lab and the station. "ONI wants it too, badly," She finished.

"I understand Mam," Taylor said. "We will be making landfall tomorrow at 0500 and I will keep you posted."

"That's first," Sandra said impressed by the knowledge that she will be updated by a military personal. If one thing Captain Jonah would like to do, according to Sandra was to keep her in the dark. Which is why she hated that man, however that was not the only reason.

"And one other thing Sergeant." Sandra turned around and tapped in few commands and ejected a small circular disc. "This is a copy of the AI, Abey. This will prove handy to you if you meet with some issues opening certain doors."

"Appreciate it, Mam," Taylor said, got the circular disc and walked off from the lab.

Sandra watched as the soldier leave, even though the war has taken a toll over him, she knew he is much younger than he looks.

"This one is different," Sandra silently muttered.

\* \* \*

><p><strong>March, 2552; Installation 03<strong>

\*\*One hour before the disappearanceâ€|\*\*

\_"Day fourteen, we are at the heart of the Cathedral. Apart from the sentinels we have not met with any other resistance. The clues have led us this far and we are optimistic. If we find what we think we are looking for, this is going to change everything. We are going to travel into the depths of this colossal forerunner structure called as, if the translations are right, 'Death Upon.' Sounds scary, but I'm excited. This is Rachel Reed signing off."\_

Rachel shoved her recorder into her bag and stepped out of the Mammoth, an UNSC Vehicle that justified its name in every aspect, which also served as the present camp site for her team. The Halo was a sight to behold. Every time she sees the land arch above her and disappear into the clouds above, she felt like being cradled into her mother's bosom. For some odd reasons, she felt home.

"Rachel, I think this is it," Dr. Rishi, a dark skinned man approached Rachel with a wide smile in his face. "I think this discovery is going to change everything," he announced proudly.

"It's going to be bigger than the discovery of these ring worlds," Rachel agreed, sharing her colleague's excitement.

"It is time," her radio echoed with Dr. Wong's voice. "We are ready at the site Rachel; We are waiting for you."

"I will be there shortly," Rachel replied back and led Rishi to the nearby modified Warthog, which had its turrets removed, making more room for her equipments. She jumped into the driver's side and started the engine. The Warthog roared as she throttled it. Rishi was tapping in commands on his datapad as he was sitting next to her. The warthog rumbled and hopped as they traversed through the untamed land of the ring world, threatening to over throw Rishi off board.

Finally the warthog came to a complete stop, skidding over the pebbles. Both Rachel and Rishi got off and entered a large tomb like area where they saw Wong standing next to a holographic panel. When he saw his fellow scientists approach, he gave a welcoming smile.

"It is done. Abey has figured out the controls for the door," Wong said with an excitement of a ten year old. Rachel was really pleased, as she approached the gigantic door, which was the only thing that was keeping her team and the secrets of the universe apart. Finally Rachel nodded at Wong and he pressed a blue holographic symbol over a console and the door slowly opened apart. In spite of her excitement, stepping into this colossal forerunner structure 'Death Upon' terrified her in a strange way. She felt like something was about to go terribly wrong.

"Timor rerum ignotarum," Rachel whispered and stepped in.

### 3. Chapter Three: Ready, Set, Go!

**\*\*Chapter Three: Ready, Set, Go!\*\***

**\*\*0500 hrs; March 2552, Installation 03\*\***

The Pelican vibrated as it passed through the artificial atmosphere of the Halo. The nose of the pelican burned as it entered the ring world making the whole flight to creak like an old pirate ship. The occupants of this pelican, the Alpha squad was led by Sergeant Taylor; who got up and peeked out through the cockpit as he held onto the railing tightly. It was Delta Halo all over again, but at least this time he was not in a blind drop in a pod like last time.

The visions of mutilated flood forms and screams of his marines rang in his ears as he looked at the familiar structures came into the vision as they passed through the first layer of the atmosphere. Those massive shining structures stood there looking back at him with the same daunting looks as he first laid his eyes upon back in the Installation 05.

"ETA in 5," the pilot announced.

"Team, gear up. Check the COMM," Taylor shouted over the roaring sound of the Pelican, which was now cruising between a valley of Forerunner architects. They were followed by the Bravo and Charlie teams on their respective Pelicans, led by Captain Jonah's personal men. Those Pelicans broke the formation and took another route as their landing sites were strategically placed to flank the Alpha landing site.

"This is Alpha 2, check," Handy replied back as he clipped in the

magazine on his SRS99-S5 Sniper rifle and pouched the extra magazines on his vest.

"This is Alpha 3, Check," George replied as he readied his Designated Marksman Rifle. Followed by Clara, "This is Alpha 4, Check." And finally Simon, "This is Alpha 5, Check."

Taylor gave a thumb up and he took out a small circular metal disk. From its flat side an Indian Cherokee girl's hologram rose, Abey. She brought out a holographic 3D map and marked a red X at a Forerunner site.

"Team that is our entry point. We will be supported by the Bravo and the Charlie. Its game time," Taylor announced as he moved toward the back of the ship and punched in the controls for the Pelican door, which slowly opened allowing a heavy gush of air into the flight as the ship cruised passed over an abandoned valley. Taylor placed his ODS helmet over his head and secured the AI's disk within his pocket and stood there at the edge with his MA5D Assault rifle ready at his hand once again loathing at the sight before him. He had only one thing on his mind. '\_He cannot fail\_.'

Pelican landed next to a massive UNSC vehicle called as Mammoth. Taylor switched on his VISR on his Heads-Up-Display. The VISR marked the vehicle as the camp site for the ONI scientists. Taylor wondered why the Mammoth was still not moved from the place as he exited out with his team. A week back this place was a sunny wonderland, now it was covered with thick snow. The weather of the Halo ring is still hard to predict.

"Never had a chance to ride in one of them," Simon said arching his head way back trying to get a complete look at the vehicle.

"Team form up," Taylor said and his Alpha squad came to a halt in front of him. "We are going to march into the site. It is eight hundred meters from here. Here onwards all communications are through the secured channel only. Move up," Taylor announced and started his jog toward the entry point followed by his team.

"Why can't the pilot land next to the site?" Simon complained as he loathed jogging over a foot deep snow. It was boot camp all over again.

"The site is located within a deep cave system, you will see," George assured him as he nudged Simon on his back with his M7S Submachine gun to make him to pick up his speed.

Clara who was right behind George, as they were running on a single file formation, had her helmet off. Because it has been a long time since she has breathed fresh air. For the past eight months she has been in the UNSC Infinity, breathing the artificial stale air. Handy who noticed this asked her, "Fancy the cold?"

"It is better than the ship's artificial air," Clara replied back as she took another deep breath in, which cleared her lungs with ease.

"This is artificial too, just a better illusion," Handy commented as he looked at the overarching ring over his head. This was his first mission on a Halo ring and he was not too keen about it



either.

Clara who gave back a blank look just replied, "As I said, it is better!"

The Alpha squad reached the foot of a mountain, which opened up into a five hundred foot cave opening. But it was not a natural formation. It had the Forerunner's glyphs all over the walls and the walls were as smooth as marbles. As the squad entered the artificial cave, an eerie silence enveloped them with occasional whistling by the gust of wind entering the cave. Clara got her helmet back on and activated her HUD's Low light target acquisition Vision mode, which lit up the dark cave by lining all the geometry before her with bright lines.

After a ten minute jog the squad came to a complete stop before a colossal door, which stretched five hundred foot from top to bottom, covering the whole area of the cave. There was a small console next to the door, with a modified Warthog next to it. Taylor's VISR pointed the warthog belonged to Dr. Rachel and once again he wondered why the previous search party has not removed the vehicle.

This time George articulated his doubt out loud. Taylor replied, "Secure the keys." George nodded and took the keys from the Warthog and placed it within his vest.

Taylor took out the AI disk and tapped it. Abey rose from the disc. "That took forever," she teased as she turned toward the console. "This will take a minute," she announced as she connected with the Forerunner console which made complicated glyph roll before her.

Taylor placed the disk over the console and pointed at George and Clara, "Three and Four, Secure the entrance. Two and Five on me." George and Clara sprinted back up to the cave entrance as Simon and Handy stood around their leader with their weapons ready.

Taylor moved near the Console which was dancing with blue and green symbols as Abey was moving her virtual hand over it as if she was manipulating those symbols. "How long?" he inquired.

"30 seconds," Abey replied without looking up.

"This is Alpha 1 to Bravo and Charlie 1. We are at the entrance and will enter in 30 seconds," Taylor announced over his COMM. After a brief sound of gun fire, a reply came back, "Damn Sentinels; copy that Alpha. Bravo and Charlie is ready."

"Copy that," Taylor replied. "Guns at ready we got company," he said as he shouldered his rifle toward the gate.

"Damn you 049," Abey muttered. Taylor was least bothered by that, but Handy was somehow curious about that statement. However he kept his curiosity to himself, for now.

"There we go," Abey said with excitement as she placed a marker over a triangle symbol on the console. Taylor moved closer and pressed it. The massive doors slowly opened apart. Simon, who was the rookie on the team shivered slightly at the sight of an ominous door opening apart and the thought of venturing into the unknown.

"Three and Four on us," Taylor announced as Clara and George came back and joined them.

Two Mammoth could have entered this doorway side by side and yet the team entered by foot. Taylor was curious again, so he decided to follow the same trend. He did not want to miss any details by cruising in through a warthog.

"Please tell me again what exactly happened to all the previous rescue team who entered here?" Simon asked with a shaky voice.

However before George, who seems to favor the little kid could reply Taylor said, "This so called 'Death Upon' Structure has been reported as a massive labyrinth. Either the previous team were going on circles or just came back out empty. So keep your hands steady Five," Taylor warned as he gave a 'go' sign and the team moved in.

\* \* \*

><p>Deep within the system, Monitor 049 Abject Testament tensed as another intrusion occurred over his system. It was the same ancilla again. He was determined this time to lure her deep within the system and crush her. He was not willing to share the system with her again. Even though the Reclaimers had their rights, this particular site was off limits. He knows that because it was encoded within him by '*Her.*' He would take any measures to make sure these Reclaimers were kept off bay, so he was willing to hurt in order to achieve that. This time he activated the 'Guardian' and its Sentinels. \_This ends here,\_ he thought as once again those doors opened up.

"\_We have our protocols. And Protocol is everything to us\_," Abject Testament muttered as he tracked the five Reclaimers who just entered through the \_'Keep.\_'

#### 4. Chapter Four: Into the Abyss

**\*\*Chapter Four: Into the Abyss\*\***

**\*\*0545 hr; March 2553, Installation 03: The Keep\*\***

Taylor and his team slowly moved into a massive room, which looked like it was carved from within the mountain. Familiar Forerunner's glyph danced in all the smooth walls. There was an iridescent blue glow from those markings making the whole room slightly lit. The ODS'Ts had their VISR on, which made the interiors bright as a day light. The room was penetrated from roof to the floor by colossal pillars which looked like it was floating off the walls. And there were dozens of them placed in perfect lines; it looked like they divided this room into different compartments. The architectures and the geometries of the Forerunners never ceased to amaze Taylor and it had the same effect on his team too, as he heard a faint whistle from Simon and moderate heart rate increase, uniformly, on his team members, including him.

The floors of this room was silky smooth, felt like walking on a thin ice and it was transparent, revealing an unending abyss beneath them.

Taylor and his ODS'Ts moved slowly and strategically so that they covered more surface area without skipping any corners. Taylor felt like he heard some kind of buzzing noise far away. He checked his radar and it was clear. Unfortunately he was not a Spartan with AI neural implant, therefore he could not ask for live updates from Abey. Every time he wanted some info, he had to pop out the AI's disk and check with her manually. He halted his team as he got Abey out. He asked her for real time three dimensional map of the area and Abey obliged as she visually brought the map out in front of his team.

This room was one of many, connected by a long bridges in between. And so far the previous teams were able to reach only the third room of this kind before they disappeared or were turned out to be dead. Taylor had to keep this part of the info hidden from his team. Because he was not sure how exactly the team was going to take the news of six rescue teams just went missing or turned out to be dead in a very strange ways. He has seen the pictures on his datapad back in the Ivanoff Station during his private debriefing. He wanted to discuss this sensitive information but again something made him to hold off. Holding off vital info like this from a team is never a good idea, however Taylor had his reasons.

"That is a long way to cover," Handy said as he saw the long halls continue forever.

"We can be easily outnumbered or overwhelmed if we get hit," George said bit concerned. This five team crew was like a tiny dot in these gigantic structures, more like ants among the men. George never felt so small or insignificant in his life, in spite of his six foot and massive body. "We need to get Bravo and Charlie here," George finally said.

"That is a negative," Taylor snapped. This massive structure was triangular in shape, with three openings located on the each side of the triangle. The other two openings, the one Bravo and Charlie were using, were discovered later, after the disappearance of the scientists. They need to cover more area, because their goal is to reach the center of this structure. The center holds the key to the disappearance, and so far none of the rescue teams has ever reached there, so it was technically an unknown and uncharted territory. And Taylor was not keen on pulling the other two teams here for their safety.

Simon and Clara were watching the team's back, but occasionally Simon turned around to give a nervous look at the projected holographic map.

"From what I gather this place has multiple tiers running along the walls of each room. One can easily follow with the team to the next levels," Abey said as she highlighted map's second floor which was narrow platform.

"But dividing the team will only make us more thin and vulnerable," George said as he was not so keen about the idea.

But Taylor had other plans. "Handy, get to the second level and cover us from there," he said as he stowed the AI's disk back to his pocket. Handy nodded once as he sprinted to the second level shouldering his Sniper rifle. Taylor felt like he needed to have a

third eye, because he felt like something big was going to hit them and truth be told he was bit terrified.

\* \* \*

><p>Dr. Sandra Tillson was closely following the movements of the Alpha team as she was tracking the AI's disk as a homing device. Captain Jonah denied access to the direct video feed from his team's external helmet camera or any voice communications.<p>

"That bastard," Tillson cursed at the thought of the Captain, as she tracked a faint red dot blinking within the structure, which was the copy of his AI, Abey. Unfortunately she can't keep track on the team members. 'If Halsey was here she would have come up with something,' Tillson thought, but was immediately repulsed by the thought of comparing herself with her rival and a war criminal. She had mighty respects for the Spartans, but she loathed the maker, Dr. Catherine Halsey.

Suddenly on her monitors multiple warm spots appeared. It originated somewhere deep within the wall of the structures and was travelling towards the three teams and judging by the number of heat spots and its intensity she can say a large amount of unknown objects travelling in massive speed.

"From the heat source, analysis what kind of object is that," Tillson ordered the real Abey. The AI immediately tried to match the heat source with her known data and showed a picture of Sentinels on the main monitor. Tillson saw the picture of the Sentinel projected on her screen by Abey. She was not worried about a group of Sentinels, because the marines are more than capable of taking care of them, but what made her to worry was the large, single heat source that followed the herd of Sentinels. She knew what exactly it was and it made her blood to run cold. That thing single handedly has destroyed every single rescue team before and now it was moving towards the Alpha team.

Abey who noticed the Doctor's vital spike calmly asked, "What is it Doctor?"

"Don't you see it? It is the Guardian Sentinel," Sandra Tillson muttered with pure horror in her eyes.

## 5. Chapter Five: The Guardian

**\*\*AUTHOR'S NOTE\*\***

**\*\*I would like to make a small correction in the Timeline. I just realized that I have chimed in the wrong year. This story line happens post Human-Covenant War, therefore it is year 2553 (Not 2552). Sorry for the confusion. Please Read and Review. Thank you!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chapter Five: The Guardian<strong>

**\*\*0600 hrs; March 2553, Installation 03: The Keep\*\***

Sandra Tillson has extensively studied that particular heat signature for the past one week, ever since its first appearance during the first rescue team's entry to the structure. And ever since it appeared all the team members were either dead or missing. She had no answer to what it was until few days back when she was intensively studying it using all known UNSC data on Covenant and Forerunners. And that is when she came across the discovery of "\_The Guardian\_" Sentinel, which is said to be the leader of the Sentinel groups. But the presence of that entity was only found and recorded during the raid of the Lesser Ark during the Human-Covenant war. It has destroyed many UNSC marines as it was a protector in the Ark. According to the records only one man, one Spartan has ever come across it and destroyed it alone and that was \_Master Chief Petty Officer Seirra 117\_.

This Alpha team was no Spartans and most of all; they are not the legend 117. Tillson asked Abey to relay an emergency warning to the Alpha team about their imminent danger and alert Bravo and Charlie about the Alpha team's dire situation and she hopped for the best. But she very well knew how exactly this was going to end. And by this time she almost confirmed that her scientists were dead and gone as she lost all hope.

\* \* \*

><p>Taylor's AI disk started to beep, but before he could open it, Handy saw the first group of Sentinels through his Sniper scope.<p>

"Incoming Sentinels at 12'o clock," Handy warned as he pulled his trigger. The bullet penetrated the first Sentinel which was leading the pack. The shot made the Sentinel to spin for a second before it went crashing into the nearby Sentinels, thus bringing down two with it and turned into a ball of fire.

This gave a quick visual cue to the Alpha team on the floor as they spun immediately towards the incoming danger and open fired. Taylor switched to his automated MA5D and open fired. Simon, who panicked, started to spray the bullets in a haphazard way.

"Controlled burst," George warned at him without taking his eyes off from his DMR scope. Clara was busy with her BR85 as she started to pick each incoming Sentinels one by one with precision. Handy had an upper hand due to the elevation and far line of sight. He was able to dispose more with much ease as he emptied his clip on the last of the Sentinels.

"Reload," Taylor shouted as he knew more would follow. The team threw away their empty or near empty magazines and slapped in the new ones as they all tensed for the next wave to hit them.

"This is Charlie One, you haveâ€|incomingâ€|watch outâ€|" only static filled Taylor's comm. He had a bad feeling about this so he asked Handy to scout ahead of them because he had a better chance of spotting the incoming danger. Handy who received the orders sprinted across the platform to get a better view of the huge room ahead. When he saw a moving shadow far away, he came to a complete stop and went prone. He got his sniper in position and looked through the scope. Another wave of Sentinels were swarming toward the team, but there was something else with them. It almost looked like a huge red eye on

a moving platform. The platform was shaped like a T and it was thirty meters from head to toe and fifteen meters across. It moved very slowly behind the Sentinels.

"We have another wave incoming," Handy radioed in. "And an unknown object approaching with them and it doesn't look friendly."

Taylor and his team took cover behind the huge columns which stretched from the roof to the floor, measuring almost One fifty meters. This time around the team paired; Clara with Taylor and George with Simon as they took cover behind each columns and waited with their fingers on the trigger with anticipation.

Once again, when the first Sentinel came into range Handy open fired. This time the Sentinels divided into two groups; one went after Handy's platform and the other group went after the ground team. Handy pulled his trigger as fast he could as he disposed the incoming Sentinels one after another. When the remaining three persuaded after him, he ran empty. So he rolled over and in one swift movement took out his Magnum and emptied the clips on the remaining three Sentinels converting them into ball of flames.

The remaining Sentinels open fired in unison, disposing their golden beams against the Ground team. The team took cover as the beam slowly melted the surface it came in contact with. Not once the team became an open target to those high powered beams as they kept slipping from one cover to another. The Sentinels descended to three meters and started to break formation in order to catch up with their slippery targets who kept playing cat and mouse game.

When Taylor saw the Sentinels break formation and became a thin line he gave order to open fire. The team broke out of their cover and started to spray the Sentinels, who desperately try to move away from the path of the bullets only ended up smacking into each other midair and got tangled, which only made them an easier target for the Alpha team.

One particular Sentinel, which sneaked behind Taylor, smacked him from the back, which made the ODS to go flying across the room and fall unceremoniously on the ground. It felt like a thunder just hit him as Taylor saw bright lights dance in front of his eyes. He was disoriented as he slowly rose from the ground where he landed helmet first. He tasted blood as he slowly rose; he saw his own blood splashed across the inside of the Visor. Just as he steadied himself he saw that Sentinel come straight at him with a glowing central light which was about to open fire it's beam. Taylor found his Assault rifle had flung away from his hands, so he ran towards the incoming Sentinel. Just as the Sentinel open fired it's beam, he slid down across the floor beneath the Sentinel and took his side arms in one swift, fluid movement and put a bullet right at the center of the Sentinel, which made the machine to explode into a ball of fire as it came crashing down to the floor in black smokes.

Just as he disposed the last of the Sentinel, the team gave a 'Hooray' as they were pumped with adrenaline and excitement. George came towards his team leader and helped him up on his foot as Clara got his rifle for him.

"Thanks," Taylor muttered as he got his helmet off. Clara immediately took out the field Med kit and tended to Taylor's upper lip's cut

which was oozing bright red blood.

"I hope the other teams are faring well," George said as he helped Clara with the Med Kit.

"Needu radthio in," Taylor tried to speak over Clara's medical care. Just then;

"INCOMING!" Handy screamed as the team turned around immediately and a saw a massive structure float in with a bright red eye. The moment it entered the hall it open fired a massive Red beam of death at the Alpha team.

## 6. Chapter Six: Haunted by the Past

**\*\*Chapter Six: Haunted by the Past\*\***

**\*\*March 2553, Installation 03: The Keep\*\***

The Alpha team just had enough time to dive out of harm's way as the new comer shot a massive red beam at their position. The beam tore through the column clean making the entire column to collapse after its midsection was melted clean off the slate by the red beam. Handy fired few shots through his gas powered sniper only to see his bullets ricochet off the enemy's shield. Taylor who saw a Forerunner structure come down like a deck of cards convinced him that the new enemy is untouchable. Because never in a million years he would have thought a Forerunner structure can be damaged in a firefight. Well in his defense this was not a normal firefight, this was an extinction.

Taylor ordered his team to fall back out of the cave. His only concern was Handy who needed more time to get off from the platform to join the team outside the cave. Therefore he decided to distract the enemy while his team had just enough time to escape this annihilation. He clearly knew his weapon is not even going to scratch this enemy so he wanted to make a noisy distraction.

When the Guardian saw three of the marines run for the exit it slowly turned towards them and charged up its beam. Meanwhile, Taylor ran toward the Forerunner machine and lobbed a grenade at it. He timed it such a way it wouldn't have enough time to bounce off and land on the ground. He cooked it for a second before he threw it at the hundred meter killing machine. The grenade landed near the Red eye just as it was firing its beam. The momentary explosion caused by the grenade near its eye while it fired its beam staggered the machine for a second. The beam missed the exiting marines by a meter, but the aftershock effect of the beam trashed Simon to the other side like a rag doll. George grabbed Simon's collar and literally dragged him out as he ran with Clara.

Handy came sliding down from the platform and landed with a thud on the ground. Just as he was about to exit the room, he saw his team leader was in trouble. Taylor, after throwing the grenade, had to run behind the Guardian, because he want that Red eye away from the team and the exit. Unfortunately now his exit was blocked by this Forerunner machine, which turned around to face the ODST.

The Guardian fired again, but this time directly at the floor. Taylor

who studied the pattern of this firing knew, that the Guardian fired its beam just before its eye turned from bright red to yellow. That knowledge gave him enough time to jump behind a column. The beam hit the column at its foot end, melting three fourth of the base, which made the column real weak. It barely stood straight under its own weight. Handy who saw the opportunity aimed his Sniper at the base of the weak column and placed three precise shots, which made the column to finally give away and slammed on to the Guardian before the slow machine could move out of the way.

Taylor saw his opening and took it in a heartbeat. He sprinted straight for the exit and he ordered Handy to get to the door controls. The column collapse didn't slow the Guardian down nor hurt it. But it gave enough time for the ODSTs to exit and hit the door controls as the room sealed shut one more time.

"What the hell was that?" George bellowed.

Taylor who was panting like a dog got his helmet off and slid down to the floor in order to catch his breath. Simon still looked shocked from the after blast effect and Clara knelt next to Taylor and inspected his lips one more time as it was bleeding more. Taylor, who finally got some air back into his lungs, pushed Clara's medical assist aside and got up.

"George get this warthog fired up. We are leaving this cave," Taylor said as he moved near the hog which was parked next to the door controls.

"Leaving?" Handy asked in doubt who still had his weapon shouldered and was facing the door as if expecting that machine to come tearing through that door like a hot knife through a cheese.

"I have a plan. First let's warn the Bravo and Charlie. I hope they have a better luck than us," Taylor said as he got into the passenger seat of the modified warthog as George got into the driver seat and fired up the engine. Handy, Clara and Simon followed suit as they got back. Usually the back side had only space of one marine or a Spartan with a turret. Since this hog was used by the scientists that turret was removed, making more space for equipments.

Just as the Warthog sped out of the cave into the snow filled road side, Taylor got his radio out and hailed Bravo and Charlie. But he got nothing but static in return. Taylor ordered George to take them to the parked Mammoth, which put a sly grin on Handy's face as he knew what exactly his team leader was thinking and he liked it. The hog tires shred through the deep snow as if it was travelling in desert dune. Finally they reached the Mammoth as the Hog came to a skidding stop, throwing the snow around like a fountain of water.

Taylor had no luck with his Comm in contacting Bravo or Charlie teams. "The Mammoth should have a better radio. Let's get in," he ordered as he and his team got into the huge UNSC's mobile command and control unit through its side opening. The team reached the vehicle's bridge which was located in the second floor in this three stories high vehicle. Taylor took out his AI's disk and plugged it into the system as Abey turned on the system and took the controls.



"Hail Bravo and Charlie," Taylor ordered.

"Of course and here is a message from Dr. Sandra Tillson prior to your encounter," she said as she played the audio message from the Doctor on the monitor.

"Alpha one, you are going to be hit by a massive Forerunner machine called as 'The Guardian.' Evade from it at all cost. It is almost indestructible," the voice of worried Dr. Sandra Tillson echoed through the speakers.

"Guardian," Clara repeated. "Catchy name for a monster."

"It's indestructible?" Simon said with a very shaky voice.

However Taylor turned to him and added, "Almost."

Abey interrupted, "I'm unable to reach them. Either their radio is down or all communications are blocked off."

Taylor thought for a second about his next move. Definitely the Guardian did not follow them out, so it is acting like a guard dog, sticking to its territory. And it is 'almost' indestructible, meaning someone has found a way to destroy it and given his current position he does have a bigger stick to play with this time. He turned towards his team and said, "This Mammoth has a Mini MAC with rocket pads and turrets. Enough firepower to bring down the Guardian's shield. Then we will take this girl for a ride in as long as she fits."

Everyone nodded in unison as they agreed to the plan. "Sounds good," George said as he ran his hand over his hair. Handy, who already guessed this also gave a thumbs up at Taylor.

"Clara get the target locator. We need that to fire the Mini MAC," Taylor ordered as Abey placed a waypoint over the target locator location within the vehicle to aid the ODST's search. "Simon and George man the Turrets. Handy you take over the controls for the rocket pads and Abey you will pilot this tub." Everyone said, "Sir, yes Sir," and jumped to their assigned task. Taylor hoped his plan was worthy enough to carry it out, because he had no other options.

"Patching through the incoming transmission from Bravo," Abey announced as she played the transmission.

"\_Back upâ€|.we are been hit heavyâ€|.Guardian on our tailâ€|heavy casualtyâ€|\_" the radio played and died.

\_Guardian\_ was the only word that ran through his mind. Another Guardian or was it the one that hit them? For all its mighty power it was awfully slow; it would have no way reached the Bravo within few minutes. Taylor was baffled by the idea. His team mates looked at him, but he knew what exactly they were thinking, should they go to the rescue. Rescue of a Rescue team, sounded amusing enough but reaching the other side of this mountain to the Bravo rescue will take time.

"Hail the Pelicans for transport. It is the fastest way to reach there," Taylor ordered to Abey.

"Already did, no response from any of the birds," Abey said. No response? That is unusual, Taylor thought. "Charlie one is hailing us," Abey said as she patched them through.

"Charlie One, this is Alpha One over," Taylor said. After few minutes for static a faint voice came through, but none of it was audible. Abey tried to clear the noise and enhance the audio but still the voice was barely audible. After few seconds the frequency died and there was nothing but static. It meant only one thing that Bravo and Charlie are in trouble or dead!

First time in his life, Taylor stood there unable to take a decision, because he was afraid. He doubted his own decision making. Whom will he try to rescue first? Will it be Bravo or Charlie? Will it be too late to reach them or has he made it too late because he was unable to come to a conclusion? Will he be once again order his team mates to death like the last one? Taylor literally stood there with a bewildered face and a terrified look in his eyes as he was haunted by his past.

Clara who noticed all the emotions on Taylor walked closer to him and said, "No matter what orders you give, we will follow Sir." This only made Taylor's decision much harder. Handy also stepped up and said, "We are with you. What do you want us to do?"

Taylor finally looked up and said, "We will carry out our mission. We are going in, will take a shot at that Guardian and we will go looking for the lost civilians. Rescuing Bravo and Charlie will be secondary." The words came out of him much colder than he expected but his heart ached to fly for the rescue. But he knows that will be futile now and will put his team in unwanted danger. At least he will be justified to die trying for the primary objective.

"Take us to the cave Abey," Taylor ordered as the six massive, heavy duty tires slowly turned and the Mammoth moved toward its objective as the ODSs took their assigned positions. Taylor was not sure whether he took the right decision or not. He was not even sure whether his team had agreed to it with whole heart. All he knew was he need to take a decision and he did. Whether it was heroic or cowardly decision will be answered by time.

**\*\*Author's Note\*\*\*\*:** If you enjoyed this Chapter, please REVIEW it. Thank you!\*\*

End  
file.